BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

LIBERTIE

KAITLYN GREENIDGE

2021 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK PRIZE WINNER
The critically acclaimed and Whiting Award-winning author of *We Love You, Charlie Freeman* returns with *Libertie*, an unforgettable story about one young Black girl’s attempt to find a place where she can be fully, and only, herself.

Coming of age as a freeborn Black girl in Reconstruction-era Brooklyn, Libertie Sampson is all too aware that her purposeful mother, a practicing physician, has a vision for their future together: Libertie is to go to medical school and practice alongside her. But Libertie, drawn more to music than science, feels stifled by her mother’s choices and is hungry for something else—is there really only one way to have an autonomous life? And she is constantly reminded that, unlike her mother, who can pass, Libertie has skin that is too dark. When a young man from Haiti proposes to Libertie and promises she will be his equal on the island, she accepts, only to discover that she is still subordinate to him and all men. As she tries to parse what freedom actually means for a Black woman, Libertie struggles with where she might find it—for herself and for generations to come.

Inspired by the life of one of the first Black female doctors in the United States and rich with historical detail, Kaitlyn Greenidge’s new and immersive novel will resonate with readers eager to understand our present through a deep, moving and lyrical dive into our complicated past.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR: KAITLYN GREENIDGE


Greenidge is currently Features Director at *Harper's Bazaar* as well as a contributing writer for *The New York Times*. Her second novel, *Libertie*, is published by Algonquin Books and out now.

LEARN MORE ABOUT KAITLYN AT KAITLYNGREENIDGE.COM
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

1. *Libertie* grew out of Kaitlyn Greenridge's research about Dr. Susan Smith McKinney Steward and her daughter. Although the characters take their origins from real people, Greenidge expands deeply on the historical record. Why do you think she chose to write this as fiction rather than nonfiction? How does that affect what you take away from the novel?

2. How does Cathy Sampson’s skin color affect what she is able to do?

3. Ben Daisy tells Libertie that his girlfriend “said if she were ever free, she’d spend all day covered in silk and she’d paint her face pretty... She knew what she would do with freedom. It wasn’t man’s work she’d do with freedom. Not like your mama. She knew better that that.” And Emmanuel Chase also has a specific definition of freedom in relation to women. How is freedom defined in the novel by men? How is it defined by women?

4. Libertie is much darker skinned than her mother, as many people remark to each of them. How does that physical fact influence Libertie’s perspective on the world? How does it inform her choices?

5. After such a clear passion for medicine and for following her mother’s path, Libertie changes her mind and decides she does not ever want to become a doctor. Why?

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6. When Cathy Simpson opens the hospital, she makes a number of compromises. How do you feel about her choices?

7. Discuss the role of the Graces. In what ways do they influence Libertie?

8. Why doesn't Cathy want Libertie to marry Emmanuel Chase? She says to Libertie, “You chose your body over your mind.” Do you agree with her assessment of Libertie's decision? What does she fear for her daughter?

9. Emmanuel Chase promises a new life for Libertie, but she confronts a number of secrets about his family's history once they move to Haiti. How did you end up feeling about Emmanuel?

10. Ella and Libertie have an initially hostile relationship, but over time, their relationship deepens as Libertie comes to understand her. How do you feel about Ella? What about the garment she embroiders—what does this reveal about Ella, about history and about who tells it?

11. There are a number of scenes depicting the beauty of living in Haiti, the scents and images of living there. At the same time, it is filled with its own secrets and limitations. How did you end up feeling about Haiti?

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What is Ti Me’s role in the novel? What does she teach Libertie?

In many ways, this novel is about the relationship between mothers and their children. Discuss Cathy and Libertie’s dynamic, and what Libertie hopes for her own children. Did you feel more drawn to Cathy or to Libertie?

Libertie is named by her father “in honor of the bright, shining future he was sure was coming.” How do you feel about Libertie’s future by the close of the novel? How do you feel about her final choice to return to America?
INTERVIEWS

Get to know award-winning author Kaitlyn Greenidge through these insightful media interviews.


Excellence Runs in the Family: Her Novel’s Heroine Wants Something Else: [nytimes.com/2021/03/21/books/kaitlyn-greenidge-libertie.html](nytimes.com/2021/03/21/books/kaitlyn-greenidge-libertie.html)

If you’ve never had this classic Haitian snack, it's worth trying to make it right away. The fritters are made from taro root, a knobby brown root vegetable common in the Caribbean and throughout Asia, and seasoned with parsley, thyme, garlic and fragrant fish chile. Grating the taro releases its starch, so the fritters can bind without the addition of flour—great for grain-free folks and also anyone who loves a light fritter—and fry up to create a crisp crust encasing a creamy, fluffy center. I serve them as soon as they leave the pan, though they're still great warm.

You occasionally see people recommend using gloves to handle taro to avoid the slightly sticky substance released when you peel it (similar to butternut squash). If you’re afraid it might irritate your hands, go ahead and use gloves or look for it pre-peeled in Asian markets.

**Ingredients**

1 pound taro root, peeled  
4 scallions, trimmed and very thinly sliced  
3 large garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1 Scotch bonnet or habanero chile, finely chopped  
1 large egg, lightly beaten  
Large handful parsley, finely chopped  
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves  
2 teaspoons kosher salt  
½ teaspoon ground black pepper  
Extra-virgin olive oil, for shallow frying  
1 juicy lime, halved, or pikliz, for serving
RECIPE: AKRA (CONT'D)
Serves 4 (makes about 20 fritters)

Make the dish

Using a metal box grater, grate the taro on the side with the smallest holes. You should get about 2 cups of pulp. Scrape the pulp into a medium bowl, add the scallions, garlic, chile, egg, parsley, thyme, salt and pepper, and stir really well. The batter keeps in an airtight container in the fridge for up to three days.

Fill a large, heavy skillet with ¼ inch of olive oil and heat over medium heat until shimmery. Line a plate with paper towels and put it near the stove.

Next, form the fritters one at a time, adding them to the oil as they’re formed. Using a dinner knife, scoop out a blade full of batter, gently patting the batter so it stays put, to create a long, skinny fritter that’s about 4 inches long and ¼ inch high. Transfer it to the oil by holding the knife right above the oil and slowly letting the batter slide off the knife, giving it a little nudge if it sticks. Repeat with the remaining batter but work in several batches to avoid crowding the pan and leave about ½ an inch between each fritter.

Fry over medium heat, carefully flipping the fritters so each side gets a turn in the hot oil, until crispy and golden brown all over and tender and creamy in the center, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer them to the prepared plate as they’re done.

Eat right away with a squeeze of lime or some pikliz.

Did you enjoy Libertie? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

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- *Conjure Women* by Afia Atakora
- *Yonder* by Jabari Asim
- *Child Bride* by Jennifer Smith Turner
- *Jam on the Vine* by LaShonda Katrice Barnett
- *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers

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